



Al-Risala 1985

December

2 December 1985

Editorial

The first generation of Muslims were moved by a sense of discovery. But present generation Muslims base their efforts on a feeling of loss. This is the basic reason for all the intellectual and ethical differences between latter-day Muslims and the original Islamic community.

For those who became Muslims at the opening of the Islamic era, Islam was the greatest of blessings. But present-day Muslims have no such feeling for their faith. All they have is a feeling that other nations have taken away from them the political supremacy that Islamic history had granted them. It is for this reason that Muslims the world over are today suffering from a persecution complex. They look at other nations as oppressors and themselves as the oppressed. They hold different nations responsible for their problems in different places. America, Israel, and Russia are variously the target of their anger and resentment.

The Jews, Hindus, and Christians, are held responsible at different moments for their plight. Because of this attitude, all they have been able to achieve through their efforts has been futile protest.

This has also had an effect on Muslim journalism. There is one thing common to the Muslim press the world over, and that is protest. Every Muslim periodical and newspaper today has adopted this tone. Their sole purpose is to put forward the Muslims' political case. But the true purpose of Muslim journalism should be to represent Islam; it should be run on the basis of principle, not on the basis of national prejudice.

If one represents a nation's case, one will spotlight its national issues. But to represent Islam, on the other hand, is to present God's religion before mankind. The Quran tells us how God sent countless prophets in ancient times, and revealed to them the scriptures. Man, however, was unable to preserve these scriptures in their original form. Then the final Prophet came to the world. The Book that was revealed to him would be preserved for all time. It is now our responsibility as Muslims to communicate this authentic book of divine guidance to all nations and all peoples of the world. True Muslim journalism is that which represents the message of Islam in this way.

3 December 1985

Remote Control

One of the terms that has recently been coined as a result of scientific discoveries and inventiveness in technology is Remote Control, – control from a distance without any material link, a method now frequently used with great success in a wide diversity of fields. The signals are sent from a base control point in coded form, to any machine or vehicle which has to be operated in a situation where manning or wire links prove impossible, for example in moving vehicles, aeroplanes, space probes and so on.* As a rule, receivers remain operative all of the twenty-four hours so that, for example, in a space flight, defects or aberrations may be immediately monitored and rectified.

* The most sophisticated use of remote control is the direction and supervision of orbiting spacecraft.

It is regrettable that this remarkable, high-precision invention should also have become a tool for terrorists. It has given them hitherto inconceivable opportunities for committing murder and mayhem, and holding governments and individuals alike to ransom, thereby causing untold distress. The bomb which was exploded with such disastrous results near the motor car of the Emir of Kuwait on the 25th of May 1985 was operated by remote control.

But whether we view this system in a positive or negative way, it serves as a fine analogy to a great but unseen reality: God's invisible control of the expanding universe. When divine instrumentality is grasped as being on a parallel with remote control, it becomes more understandable and explicable in terms of purely human inventiveness.

3 December 1985

One who has no hate in his heart will enter heaven

The Prophet was sitting with some companions one day. "There is a person coming here down from the mountains who is one of the companions of paradise," the Prophet said. The companions immediately saw someone appearing on that path. They greeted him, and told him that the Prophet had described him as one of the companions of paradise. "What do you do that is so special?" they asked. "Nothing in particular," he replied. "All I can say is that I hold no rancour in my heart towards any Muslim."

Mir Syed Ali Hamdani

The Muslim hold over the politics of Kashmir is entirely the legacy of Mir Syed Ali Hamdani, or Amir Kabir, as he is better known. A native of Iran, he was forced to leave his homeland and came to Kashmir when he fell from the favour of King Timur (1335-1405). Once in Kashmir, one of the options he had was to call for a holy war against Timurin order; to establish a fair and honest government in Iran, even at the cost of his own martyrdom. This would have been quite feasible because many of the Iranian monarch's contemporaries had turned against him on political grounds. He could alternatively have involved himself in championing the rights of the local Muslims who found themselves in the position of a weak and insecure minority who were even – it is alleged – forced to bow to idols. In doing so, he could have become their leader. Another cause in which he could have figured prominently was that of harmonising the various local groups who were perpetually at loggerheads. This he could have done in the name of humanitarianism. But he did not elect to do any of these things in spite of the fact that they would have won him great popularity. The reason was quite simple. None of these activities had any direct connection with true Islamic missionary work, whose purpose was not to direct the attention of the people to the affairs of the world but towards God and eternity.

His main preoccupation then was the preaching of Islam, which he set about in a quiet practical way. He and the forty companions who had come with him from Iran spread out over the state, learning the Kashmiri language and surmounting all the difficulties of adapting to a foreign environment. Everywhere they went they preached Islam quietly, but they were unflagging in their missionary work. Amir Kabir even tried to reform the Muslim ruler, Sultan Qutbuddin, who was very far from perfect from the Islamic point of view. But Amir Kabir made no attempt to depose him and set up an upright ruler in his place. He restricted himself to writing to him, being careful to keep the tone of his letters humble and conciliatory. He was far above political motivations, and based his policies and actions on his own positive way of thinking.

Amir Kabir preached only the fundamental tenets of the faith and did not involve himself in theological issues. He went so far as to conceal from his followers the fact that he was an adherent of the Shafii school. The local people had been Hanafis from the time of Ranjan Shah (AD 1320-1333), a Buddhist ruler who had been converted by Syed Bulbul Shah. If Amir Kabir had urged the new converts to follow his school, this would have lead to factionalism, and the true practices and objectives of Islam would have been obscured in unnecessary wrangling. Because he believed in uniting people and not dividing them, he even used to pray with the people in the Hanafi way, and told his companions to do the same. He was thus able to enjoy the support of all groups and was free to spread the word of Islam. So successful were his efforts that Kashmir became a permanent Muslim-majority area. His work in Kashmir is a classic demonstration of how to spread Islam in a balanced, constructive way.

The message of his life, which unfortunately came to an end at the age of 73, due to poisoning, is that if a true Islamic revival is to be brought about, all thoughts of confrontation must be banished and all political and religious disputes must be eschewed entirely. That is the way to earn divine assistance. That is the way to bring dignity and honour to Muslims and their faith.

5 December 1985

The Prophet and his companions

Certain bearers of gifts to Abu Dhar Ghefari, failing to find him in Rabdhah, because he had gone on a pilgrimage to Mecca, went on to meet him at Mina, and happened actually to be in his presence when he was told that Uthman ibn Affan, who was the caliph of the Muslims at the time, had prayed four rak'ats in Mina; he had not shortened his prayer, as one normally does on a journey. This upset Abu Dharr, and he had some harsh words to say. "How does Uthman pray four rak'ats," he wondered, "When I myself have prayed two rak'ats with the prophet, with Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, and with Umar, the second Caliph." Then Abu Dhar arose, and prayed four rak'ats himself. People were puzzled at his doing the very thing for which he had criticized the Commander of the Faithful, and asked the reason. "Causing conflict is a grave matter," he explained.

5 December 1985

How a believer should treat others

Ali said of the Prophet: "He himself shunned three things: quarrels, pride and idleness. And three things he refrained from inflicting upon others: he did not belittle anyone, did not lay blame on anyone; nor did he dwell on anybody's weaknesses.'

(Tirmidhi)

6 December 1985

Incomplete Map

E.E. Schumacher in his book, "*A Guide to the Perplexed*," has narrated an interesting story about a visit he made to Leningrad. He says, "Some years ago (August 1968), I consulted a map to find out where I was, but I could not make it out. I could see several enormous churches, yet there was no trace of them on my map. When finally an interpreter came to help me, he said 'We don't show churches on our maps'".

It may appear quite strange for a map to exclude something which prominently exists in the area. This is not the case, however, with communist countries alone. It applies equally to a large part of the rest of the world. Just as in the map of Leningrad, churches have been omitted, so has the modern system of thought done away with God altogether. God receives no mention in the map of life. Modern man has built up the study of geography with great detail and precision, he has made vast discoveries in the world of astronomy, and made massive advances in the world of man and nature. But there is no trace of God in sight.

To modern man, the universe is moving with such speed and precision entirely on its own initiative. Innumerable huge stars and planets are shining of their own volition. Amazingly favourable conditions have accumulated in perfect harmony purely by chance. The birth, life and death of man are governed by the blind forces of nature. We do not find on our temporal map any description of God's supervision of the affairs of the world.

Leningrad's incomplete map is ridiculous, no doubt, but what is more so is the vaster map of the world which man has prepared with great labour, yet in which he has accorded no place to God. How can we chart a proper course in life if we use a map from which the most important element is missing?

6 December 1985

The sin of aiding and abetting wrong doing

Waslah Ibn 'Asqa' asked the Prophet what prejudice was. "To aid your own people in oppression," the Prophet replied.

(Abu Dawood)

7 December 1985

The Courage of one's Faith

At the close of the second world war when the Allied Powers had finally defeated Germany, the majority of the Nazi leaders were executed by hanging at the very place, Berlin, where they had plotted the extermination of the whole of the non-Aryan world.

This incident occurred in 1946. Hitler and Goering had already committed suicide for fear of facing a humiliating death by execution. But other leaders, Ribbentrop, Keitel, Alfred Rosenberg, Wilhelm, Julius, Jodl, and other Nazi leaders, who were still alive at that time were all executed without exception.

These were the leaders who had assassinated 40 lakh of the Jews for no good reason and had illegally taken possession of their property. These leaders, waged such a bloody battle that leaving aside the huge toll of their supposed enemies – 20 lakh of the Germans themselves lost their lives in it. They had forced millions of people to live a life worse than that of the animals. Their hearts did not melt at the sufferings of the old and the handicapped. They simply shot them, considering them of no value to the country! The sight of the dead and decaying bodies of young and old, of widows and orphans never brought them to their senses.

And after their defeat, when these 'brave' leaders were brought to the scaffold for execution, their faces turned pale. Their legs trembled. These eloquent leaders could not utter a word, for their tongues had failed them. They had lost the power of speech. When those who had played so recklessly with the lives of others, saw what their own fate was to be they went mad.

Those whose boldness is based on materialism turn into cowards when they are divested of their props. But those who place their confidence in the eternal God, stand firm as rocks at all times, whether or not they have any external support.

If faith in the help of God is alive in man he can never fall a prey to desperation. Even in the face of powerful enemies he will be a rock of courage and determination. Amidst a host of enemies he will find a way out just as if they never existed at all.

7 December 1985

The sin of aiding and abetting wrong doing

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(Abu Dawood)

8 December 1985

Lost Opportunities

"There are thousands of Hindus whose mother tongue is Urdu and who can well be considered scholars in Urdu language. Pandit Moti Lal Nehru and Dr. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru are amongst them." This is a quotation from Mahatma Gandhi's journal, *Harijan* of the 29th October, 1938.

An even earlier testament to the position of Urdu in India is the wedding card of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru whose superscription was couched in Urdu (1916). This can be seen in the Nehru section of the Allahabad Museum.

In the period leading up to the freeing of India from foreign rule, even the Europeans who came to India learned to speak Urdu fluently, because, for a variety of historical reasons, the Urdu-speaking community enjoyed an eminent position in the country.

But now the position has greatly changed and foreigners who wish to make close contacts with India now learn Hindi. A case in point is that of the daughter of former U.S. Ambassador to India, Dr. Daniel Patrick Moynihan. During the Festival of India organized in the U. S. A. this year, Miss Moynihan acted as one of the project coordinators. A photograph of her was published in the newspapers on June 8, 1985, sitting by the side of an Indian girl. It was pointedly mentioned in the caption that she was fluent in Hindi.

This is the sign of a new era in India and one which has been to the detriment of the Urdu-speaking section of the nation. Why is this now so? It is because its members failed to realize that a time would come when God-given opportunities, which all along had been theirs for the grasping, would be taken away from them forever. It is from this failure to seize and make the most of such opportunities that Urdu speakers are now suffering.

8 December 1985

Justice for all

Muawiyah, the son of Abu Sufyan, asked Dharar to describe 'Ali. Part of Dhirar's description went like this. "He was like any one of us. No powerful person could have his way with him in pursuit of falsehood, and no weak soul had cause to despair of being treated justly by him."

9 December 1985

Agreeing to Disagree

In late December 1984 the Soviet First Deputy Prime Minister, Ivan Arkhipov, made a nine-day visit to the People's Republic of China. The two giants of the communist world have been at odds with one another over ideological differences for the last twenty-five years. For most of this time relations between the two countries have been so strained that there has been no dialogue worthy of the name between them. Mr. Arkhipov was the most senior Russian leader to visit China since 1969.

Differences, both ideological and political, still divide the two neighbours. Moscow believes that recent economic reforms undertaken by China could undermine communism. The presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan, and Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea, is a bone of contention as far as the Chinese are concerned. Added to this there are continuing and interminable border disputes along the massive common frontier.

Yet despite all these differences Russia and China have decided to put their political and ideological differences to one side and cooperate in other areas where they have common interests. In economic and technical fields, for instance, both countries have found that they have much to gain from closer ties. According to a Reuter report:

"Both sides have a major interest in developing their economic relations, despite continuing big political differences. The Soviet Union needs food from China to feed Siberia, while Beijing wants Soviet technical help and machinery."

Accordingly the two sides agreed to increase trade in 1985 to 1.8 billion dollars. They also signed a 1986-1990 trade agreement, and accords on economic, technical and scientific cooperation. Discussions between Arkhipov and Chinese leaders dwelt entirely on areas of mutual interest and accord. The Soviet Deputy P.M. appeared to steer clear of sensitive political issues which still divide Moscow and Beijing. He even showed "a keen interest in China's radical economic reforms, despite the Soviet regime's innate abhorrence of them.

Some disagreement is always inevitable between two parties or individuals in this world. But it is also inevitable that there must be some areas of agreement. This being the case, there is only one way to prosper and progress; that is, to ignore the matters that divide one from others and concentrate on cultivating areas of mutual concern.

10 December 1985

The Precipice

Today he came to see me unexpectedly, at an odd hour, and he did not even accept the offer of a cup of tea. He said, "I have to reach home soon. My wife must be waiting for me." And then, in a hurry, he started his scooter and set off. Barely half an hour later, the telephone bell rang. It was his wife. In a greatly agitated tone, she stammered, "Your friend...." I could hear her sobs and cries, and the meaning of the sentence could be guessed. Putting the receiver down hastily, I rushed to her house. Having said goodbye to me he had reached home, but while climbing the stairs he had stumbled and fallen down. Some people carried him upstairs and the doctor was immediately called, but he could only declare him dead.

When he rode off on his scooter, he had apparently set off for his home but, in truth, he was heading towards death. This is not an unusual event. Such events take place every day and in all kinds of places. On 26 May, 1979, a big jet plane took off from O'Hare airport. Shortly afterwards it crashed, and burst into flames. All of the 271 passengers were burnt to death. This particular accident happened with a small number of people, but such is going to be the fate of all human beings. All men who are on the move are actually heading towards death and destruction. Death is closer to man than life itself. Everyone is standing on the verge of death. Everyone is in danger of having come to the end of his period on earth and of being taken off at any moment to the next world from where he will never come back. Then his existence will be one of either eternal hell or eternal heaven.

When a blind man comes across a well on his way, everyone knows that the greatest thing at that moment is to warn him of it. How strange it is that the whole human race is standing on the brink of the most dangerous precipice, yet one never feels the need to give warning of it. When a servant of God gives a danger signal, far from being appreciated he is ridiculed and labeled a traitor. He is accused of wanting to lull the nation into the comfortable sleep of cowardice, of trying to dampen the spirit of holy war among the Muslims, of wanting to shift the emphasis from real issues. He is vilified as being not the messenger of life but of death and doom. Humanity stands on the brink of a precipice, but people are so disinclined to look in front of them that they have illusion of being safely at home. People are heading towards death but are happy in the thought that they are advancing on the journey of life.

11 December 1985

The Greatest Asset

Lord William Wintock, British governor-general in India from 1828 to 1835, has the dubious distinction of being remembered as the man who ordered the destruction of the Taj Mahal in Agra – an order which happily, he was never able to have carried out. This was revealed at the turn of the century by the then viceroy, Lord Curzon. The East India Company had been going through hard times, Lord Curzon explained, and it was suggested to Lord Wintock that a sale of the Taj would fetch Rs. 100,000/-, – enough to extricate the company from its financial crisis. News of the Company's intentions circulated, and there was stiff opposition to such a move. This infuriated Lord Wintock, who now went one step further and gave orders for the total destruction of the Taj. Opposition to the imperial command stepped up, with both Hindus and Muslims joining in one massive voice of the protest. The danger that full-scale rebellion would ensue if the Taj was destroyed prompted the governor-general's advisers to persuade Lord Wintock to withdraw the order.

The people did not save the Taj Mahal, it was saved by its own beauty. If the Taj Mahal had not been beautiful, it would not have won such overwhelming support; Hindus and Muslims would not have united behind it to foil the British government's designs.

Had the constructors of the Taj Mahal been able to reproduce in themselves the beauty which they produced so perfectly in their work of construction, they too would have been protected by their own quality. Just as virtue in a thing wins support for its cause, so virtue in humans has the same effect. It wins one friends from the enemy camp, appreciation even from strangers.

The Taj Mahal's virtue lies in its beauty, while man's beauty lies in a virtuous nature. But man's beauty should not be like that of a snake, – a beautiful appearance marred by a venomous sting. How do men "sting"? By presenting a challenge to people's political and economic interests; by repeatedly resorting to violence in their dealings with others; by constantly alienating people with senseless, impulsive actions. Any virtue that one might have is cancelled out by such a "sting", and prevents one from winning people's affection.

It is the Taj Mahal's silent beauty that has won people's hearts. Who would have time for it if, in all its beauty, it tormented those who looked upon it?

12 December 1985

Playing the Part Properly

British actor Ian Richardson plays the part of Jawaharlal Nehru in a new Anglo-American television series entitled "Mountbatten in India". Realizing the difficulties of a foreigner playing the part of one who remains a hero in the sight of his countrymen. Richardson prepared himself for the task in hand with amazing rigour. First he made a pilot trip to India. "I said I couldn't possibly play it unless I felt in touch, could smell, could taste, would have Delhi belly, could have whatever is associated with India."

Then he started reading. "I read so much about Nehru it was coming out of my armpits. In his own words largely." He listened to recordings of all Nehru's speeches and then compiled an enormous personal pronunciation dictionary. "It meant that I would prepare a scene, memorize it, then refer to my Nehru dictionary, underlining key words with various asterisks in the corner of the page." He went to incredible lengths to look and sound like Nehru. "I feel I have to look as close to the character, to be as close to the character as possible."

This is the length to which people go to play a part which is just going to occupy a short period of their lives. Muslims also have a role to play, and one that should occupy every moment of their entire lives on earth. It is the role of their leader, the Prophet Mohammad, may peace be upon him, who within the twenty-three years of his mission, completed a revolution which completely reoriented people's thinking, and reverberated the world over.

This is a role which can only be performed with intense preparation. The world is awaiting a revolution in consciousness, the like of which has not been seen since the day of the Prophet of Islam. It is up to his followers to initiate this revolutionary process. To do this, they must acquaint themselves with every department of the Prophet's life. They must become familiar with the manner in which he set about his task, the skill, wisdom, dexterity and tact with which he asserted the ascendancy of true religion on earth, and put falsehood to flight.

To become a true Muslim is to play the part of the Prophet Mohammad on earth. It is to involve oneself fully in the struggle for revival of true faith in God. This is the most mighty and all-consuming task. It requires much more rigorous preparation than that which an actor undergoes to perform a mere theatrical role.

Man's Predicament

There are plenty of people in the world today who voice concern over matters affecting the Muslims as a community, but their concern is for the most part directed towards matters of superficial import. As for the deep, meaningful side of religion, there is no one who pays any attention to it. A fundamental human weakness lies behind this tendency: man always sets his sights on things that he can see; as for things which do not meet his eye, he finds it extremely difficult to pay any attention to them.

Man worships things that he can see; he does not understand how he can worship something which cannot be seen. He is quick to engage himself in activities which he can perceive the results of, but he refrains from taking any part in tasks which do not appear to pay any dividends. He is fully conscious of the importance of something which he can actually see, in solid form, standing before him; as for that which is not present for him to see, he ignores it as if it did not exist.

This superficiality, the attachment to forms rather than meanings; is man's greatest weakness. In its most extreme form, it manifests itself as worship of false gods. Even if one retains one's faith in God, it prevents one from becoming close to God, and increasing in faith.

There are two main forms of transgression which come from man's attachment to forms. One is polytheism, which is to worship some visible gods along with the invisible God. The other is atheism, which is denial of any God that cannot be seen. But sometimes this human weakness takes another form which, in effect, is no less serious; that is, to believe, but to be void of the radiance of faith. The radiance of faith enables one to see God, despite His invisibility. One who does not see with this divine light may express belief in God, but he cannot feel God's presence; his heart remains attached to things which he can see and feel with his outward senses.

Discovery of God means that one has penetrated beyond the world of outward forms and delved into the world of hidden meanings. Those who do not make this discovery can only appreciate the worth of one who is surrounded by a wealth of worldly splendour. They remain blind to the merit of one who possesses in his soul a wealth of spiritual meaning. God is the source of all reality and meaning. One who fails to find Him fails to find the world of meanings. He remains forever transfixed to forms.

14 December 1985

Appreciation

The historian, Ibn Khaldun has narrated how Abu Musa Ash'ari, the commander of the Iraqi army, reprimanded a certain Muslim soldier who served under him and had his head shaved as a punishment. The soldier collected the hair and brought it to Caliph Umar. Putting the hair before him, the soldier said in anger, "This is how your people treat us." Instead of feeling affronted at such audacity, the Caliph was so pleased at his boldness that he said, "If all the people were as brave as you are, I would prefer them to all the land that has been conquered!"

There were two points of view from which one could judge the soldier's action. On the one hand, one could call his behaviour sheer brashness and effrontery: but on the other hand, one could see it as boldness and bravery. Caliph Umar ignored the crosser aspects of his behaviour and commended him for his positive qualities.

If the Caliph had taken offence at his misbehaviour and consequently punished him, sought to send him to jail or at least given him a severe reprimanding, he would surely have derived personal gratification from having had his revenge for this personal affront, but this gratification would have been achieved at the cost of losing a brave man on the front.

A manly man is more valuable than all the material valuables in one's possession. But such a man is always bold and does not stoop to obsequiousness. Only those can avail of the services of valiant men who have the heart to ignore their criticism and audacity, and can judge them on true merit rather than on mere appearances.

14 December 1985

Willingness to give others pride of place

When 'Umar Ibn Khattab lay dying, he asked his son 'Abdullah to go and see 'Aishah. "Greet her and tell her that 'Umar Ibn Khattab asks for permission to be buried next to his master. Be sure not to call me Commander of the Faithful, for today I am no longer in that position." 'Abdullah Ibn 'Umar went to see 'Aishah, and found her seated, crying. He greeted her and gave her his father's message. "You know," 'Aishah replied, "I was reserving that place for myself, but today I will certainly give 'Umar precedence over myself."

(Ibn Sa'ad)

15 December 1985

Irreverence

A few months ago, George Menezes was asked to preside over the inauguration of a College Summer Camp. In the course of his address, he recounted how a teacher had dropped in at his house in Colaba to inform his father that his brother had failed in the maths paper of his matriculation examination by just a few marks. "The moderator is expecting a telephone call from you, Sir," he said "and the rest will be taken care of." It so happened that in that particular year Mr. Menezes Senior was Under-Secretary for Education, and Mr. B.C. Kher being Minister of Education for Bombay, the boards. Colleges and Schools all came under his jurisdiction. But the father was blunt with the teacher. "If my son deserves to fail, let him fail. It will teach him a valuable lesson." Having finished this salutary tale, he looked expectantly into the faces of his young audience. But instead of appreciative murmurs he was greeted with sniggering which began to reach embarrassing proportions when a young man jumped up and shouted, "Your father must have been a fool! If he had done that to me, I would have killed him!"

Such blatant irreverence has become no uncommon thing among the younger generation of today both in India and in Pakistan. But where does the fault lie? The blame for this attitude must be placed fairly and squarely at the door of those leaders who act as rabble-rouses, who inculcate hatred and foster enmity in students purely to serve their own private ambitions. The students are there, en masse, on the university campuses and, being easily approachable, can be swayed and exploited. As a result, time-honoured traditions of courtesy and respect are broken with. In fact, all reasonable norms are flouted. Friends and foes alike become engulfed when matter get out of hand, and it is high time we halted in our tracks and made a thorough reappraisal of what our social commitments ought in all sincerity to be, so that the young people of today do not have their feet set by a pernicious leadership on what can only be a collision course for the future.

15 December 1985

Following up a wrong with a right

'Umar said that the best way to deal with one who has disobeyed God with regard to you, is to obey God with regard to him.

(*Tafseer Ibn Kathir*)

16 December 1985

The Ability to Memorize

What the law has to say about bearing witness finds mention in the Quran in the following verse:

"When you contract a debt for a fixed period, put it into writing. And call in two male witnesses from among you, but if two men cannot be found, then one man and two women whom you judge fit to act as witnesses; so that if either of them forgets, the other will remember." (2:282)

The testimony of two women has been regarded as equal to that of one man. The phrase 'so that if either of them forgets, the other will remember', makes it quite obvious that this rule is based on natural ability, rather than on discrimination against the weaker sex. This command sets a value upon memory per se.

This divine injunction has come to be exposed to severe criticism in the last couple of centuries on the basis of the concept that men and women were counterparts rather than complements to one another.

How strange it is then for science to have reached the same conclusions and testify to the truth mentioned in the Quran. Women, in general, have poorer memories than men. The law of witness in Islam is no more than a reflection of this biological fact.

We quote here a part of a news-item which appeared in *The Times of India* (18 January 1985)

"Men have a greater ability to memorize and process mathematical information than women, but females are better with words, a Soviet scientist says, reports UPI. "Men dominate mathematical subjects due to the peculiarities of their memory," Dr Vladimir Konovalov told the Tass news agency. "The stronger sex shows greater difficulties in processing and adapting language material."

16 December 1985

Worship, unity and benevolence

According to Abu Hurairah, the Prophet mentioned three actions which were especially pleasing to God. "That you should worship God, not associating any partners with Him; that you should cling to His rope, and not be divided among yourselves; and that you should be well-wishing towards those who are responsible for your affairs."

(Muslim)

17 December 1985

How Strange That Life Should and Like That

Nandini, daughter of Govind Narain, former governor of Karnataka, was just 38 years old when she passed away in New Delhi on September 16, 1981. Thus a young, vibrant life came to a sudden halt; a cheerful face was removed from the scene of life.

Nandini was an intelligent and healthy person. After receiving higher education in India, she acquired a degree in journalism from America. She then became a senior reporter with *The Hindustan Times*. Her versatile and dashing talent made her a popular figure with her colleagues. As one of them put it: "She loved life to the full and wanted to live it to the full."

Several of her colleagues contributed to a commemorative article published in *The Hindustan Times* September 17, 1981. They conclude their article with these words:

"It is a cruel reminder of the fact that there is a deadline for everyone."

How strange it is that the flame of life should suddenly be extinguished, a laughing face suddenly grow still to be buried beneath the earth; how strange that a spirit full of hope and aspirations should be removed from the scene of life, leaving all its hopes and aspirations behind in the world.

How meaningful life appears to be and how meaningless it is rendered by its conclusion. How free man appears to be, but how helpless he is before death. How dear he holds his desires and ambitions, only for fate to ruthlessly stamp them out.

Remembrance of death would alone be enough to cure man's rebellious nature. Peace and harmony on earth can only come from man learning his limitations, and resigning himself to them. There is no better way of learning this lesson than by remembering death.

17 December 1985

Do as you would be done by

Abu Hurairah reported the Prophet as saying: "When your Muslim brother comes to you to excuse himself, accept his excuse, for otherwise you will not receive from me the water that I shall hand out at the Pond of Plenitude."

17 December 1985

Speaking little, and not holding grudges against anyone

A companion of the Prophet lay dying. People saw that his face was shining, and asked why. "I had two habits which stood me in good stead." the man

18 December 1985

All the Heroes are Dead

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), the celebrated American author, whose correspondence during his military career has been published in book form, participated in the war against Italy in 1918. At one point he was injured in battle and had to be hospitalized, during which time he wrote several letters to his relatives. In one letter he writes:

"There are no heroes in this war. All the heroes are dead. And the real heroes are the parents. They suffer a thousand times more. And how much better to die in all the happy period of disillusioned youth, to go out in a blaze of light, than to have your body worn out and illusions shattered." (*Life*, June 1981)

What a gloomy, depressing picture of life is painted by these words.

Man seems to be born into this world only to disappear from it in a hundred years, more or less, worn out with old age. If this is all that life has in store, one should rather end one's life in the hope - filled period of youth by taking a heroic plunge into the unknown.

It is only when we bring in the concept of life after death, that our old age as well as our youth assumes any significance. Separate the two, and there is nothing but gloom and despair to haunt us for ever. Divested of the concept of an after-life, worldly life loses all its significance. It becomes so inexplicable and mysterious, that life and death have no meaning.

18 December 1985

A sense of responsibility, not greed for power, makes one fit to lead

When Abu Bakr was elected Caliph, he addressed the people. "By God," he said, "I never had any greed or desire for power. Never, either secretly or openly, have I asked God for it. I have only taken it on for fear of friction; despite the fact that there will be no comfort for me in the caliphate. I have put a yoke on my neck which it is beyond my strength to carry; it is only trusting in God's strength that I carry it. I would prefer anyone of you who is more fit than me for the task, to take it on."

(Baihaqi, Hakim)

Muhammad The Prophet of Islam

Part IV, Chapter II

A NURSERY OF HEROES

In this book, *The History of the Arabs*, Professor Philip Hitti has written that "after the death of the Prophet, sterile Arabia seems to have been converted as if by magic into a nursery of heroes the like of whom both in number and quality is hard to find anywhere."

For Islam to reign supreme in the world, people's entire way of thinking has to change. Islamic thought has to gain the ascendancy over every other system of thought. This was the task that God chose the Prophet and his companions to perform – the immensity of which task should not be underestimated. Only after being reared in a nursery of heroes did the Prophet's immediate successors become capable of performing it. They established the dominance of Islamic thought over polytheistic thought, after surmounting numerous and hazardous obstacles. But today Islam has once again lost its dominance – this time to atheistic thought. For its ascendancy to be re-established, another nursery of heroes will have to emerge. If the Prophet and his immediate successors had to undergo such a rigorous phase of initiation, there is no reason why his latter-day successors should not have to do so.

Just as the followers of the prophet in his day suffered every privation and courted every danger to bring Islam to its position of supremacy in the world, so Muslims in the present day have staged titanic struggles for its restoration. In terms of sheer human exertion, the efforts which modern Muslims have made for the sake of Islam have been even greater than those made by Muslims of the Prophet's time. They have sacrificed their lives and properties, expended time and energy on preparing literature and lectures in support of Islam; they have traveled great distances in furtherance of the Islamic cause. As far as the quantum of effort put in concerned, the struggle of present-day Muslims in the path of Islam has been much greater than that of the Prophet's contemporaries and his immediate successors. As far as results are concerned, however, the story is very different. The efforts expended by the Prophet and his companions changed the course of human history while the efforts of present-day Muslims have only aggravated their own plight.

The reason for this difference can be found in the differing psychologies that lie behind the struggle of the first Muslims on the one hand, and that of modern Muslims on the other. While the former were moved by a sense of discovery, the latter have been moved by a sense of loss. The address which Ja'afar gave in the court of the Negus, king of Abyssinia, provides a vivid picture of the feelings which moved the companions. When the Quraysh sent two men to try and secure the return of those Muslims who had emigrated to Abyssinia, the Negus questioned the Muslims about their religion. Ja'far's response was: "O king, we were a people steeped in ignorance, worshipping idols, eating unsacrificed carrion, committing abominations, and the strong would devour the weak. Thus we were, until God sent us a

Messenger from out of our midst, one whose lineage we knew, and his veracity and his worthiness of trust and his integrity. He called us unto God, that we should testify to His Oneness and worship Him and renounce what we and our fathers had worshipped in the way of stones and idols; and he commanded us to speak truly, to fulfill our promises, to respect the ties of kinship and the rights of our neighbour, and to refrain from crimes and from bloodshed. So we worship God alone, setting naught beside Him, counting as forbidden what He has forbidden and as licit what He has allowed. For these reasons have our people turned against us, and have persecuted us to make us forsake our religion and revert from the worship of God to the worship of idols. That is why we have come to your country, having chosen you above all others; and we have been happy in your protection, and it is our hope, O king, that here, with you, we shall not suffer wrong."

We can see from Ja'afar's words how much Islam meant to him, and on whose behalf he was talking. Islam was for them a life of conscious awareness as opposed to ignorant neglect; it was a discovery of One God, an abandonment of idols. They had shunned the path of falsehood, and taken the road of divine guidance, revealed to them through the Prophet Mohammad. They now sought eternity, not the world. Gone was the permissiveness of yesteryear; what they had discovered now was the joy of an upright moral bearing – the path of justice as opposed to oppression, of kindness as opposed to cruelty.

Such was the state of the first Muslims. With their latter-day counterparts, however, things are quite different. What moved the Muslims of the Prophet's time was a feeling of having found great spiritual enlightenment. What moves the Muslims in the modern age is a sense of having lost out in life – a sentiment reflected in words such as these uttered by their leaders:

"We have lost all our forefathers' legacy. Heaven has thrown us down from the high Pleiades to the earth."

Practically all Muslim movements of modern times have arisen out of a feeling of loss and persecution. They may differ from one another in the way they put their point across. Some use the language of nationalistic politics, while others confine themselves to religious terminology. But in essence they are all the same, being derived from a feeling of having lost their glory of the past.

When the Greek mathematician Archimedes (287-212 BC) discovered a law of specific gravity, he was so overjoyed that he ran home without his clothes, shouting "eureka, eureka" (I have found it, I have found it). In the joy of his discovery he felt as if he had found everything.

The Shah of Iran lost just his throne, but look what became of him afterwards. His loss deprived him of even the will to live. Such is the nature of both discovery and loss. All one sees is the object that one has discovered, or lost.

It is this difference of mentality which lies at the root of the differing results which emerged from the efforts of the first Muslims, on the one hand, and those of latter times on the other. A sense of discovery imbues one with an unquenchable spirit, putting vitality into one's thoughts and an irresistible dynamism into one's actions. A sense of loss, meanwhile, dooms all one's efforts to failure. One plagued by such a feeling becomes incapable of constructive thought or action. The first Muslims were moved by a sense of

discovery. That is why they produced an incomparable example of dynamic action. Modern Muslim movements have sprung from a feeling of loss, and for this reason have given use to an unprecedented saga of misconceived policies and ill-fated initiatives.

There is no doubting the fact that a feeling of discovery engenders positiveness of character, while negativity is all that can come from a feeling of loss. The elevated and noble manner in which the first Muslims conducted their affairs was a result of their sense of discovery. They were high-minded enough to bow low before truth, magnanimous enough to acknowledge the worth of others. People of their word, they did exactly what they said they would. They were forgiving to others, in the hope that God in turn would be forgiving to them. So constant was their vision of truth that they would not waver from it; nor would they allow their own feelings to cloud their vision of it. Their decisions were based on sound reason. They did things – not to retaliate for the way they had been treated – but because they were the right things to do.

This is how a positive character works. The functioning of a negative character is totally different. Negativity is to follow impulse rather than truth. The hesitant and suspicious nature that it fosters prevents one from taking meaningful initiatives, or co-operating with others. A lack of realism dominates one's attitudes, both towards oneself and to others. Unable to see things in terms of truth, one sees them through one's own tainted vision. One's own ability is inflated in one's view, while that of others is minimized. One's defeats turn into victories in the fairy-tale world of one's own imagination, while in reality even one's successes turn into failures. It is here that present day Muslims differ from the founding fathers of their religion.

The Prophet of Islam brought an unprecedented revolution to the world, one that was initiated from a profound feeling of spiritual discovery, and was accomplished by a unique display of positive virtues. Should anyone wish to achieve the same revolution from the negativity that comes from a sense of loss, he should have to find another God – for it is not God's will that this should happen. He should also have to find another prophet – for that was not the way of the Prophet.

22 December 1985

Rectifying others and being ready to be rectified oneself

When Abu Bakr was elected to be the first Caliph of Islam he addressed the people. "I have been put in charge of your affairs," he said, "though I am no better than you. I will consider the weakest of you as the strongest, as long as I have not ensured that he receives his rightful due. And the strongest that he receives his rightful due. And the strongest among you will to me be the weakest, as long as I have not ensured that he pays what he owes. People, I am just like anyone of you. If you see that I am pursuing a proper course, then follow me; and if you see me err, then set me straight."

23 December 1985

The Path of Prayer

It has been related that Abdul Malik ibn Marwan, (23-85AH), an Umayyad caliph, preached an eloquent sermon one day, then wept unrestrainedly. When he had calmed down, he said, "O, my Lord, I have undoubtedly sinned greatly, but Your forgiveness, however little, will far outweigh the greatness of my sin. O, my Lord, bless me with Your forgiveness, be it never so little." When Hasan Basri, the great contemporary religious scholar heard about this, he was moved and said, "If any words were worthy of being written in gold, it was surely them."

Abdul Malik ibn Marwan, a Tabi'i (one of those who conversed with the companions of the Prophet) was a great and intelligent statesman. It was his governor, Hajjaj ibn Yousuf Thaqafi, who invaded Mecca and killed Abdullah ibn Zubair, the rival of Abdul Malik ibn Marwan.

It is evident from this that even the cruelest of rulers of that time were not totally bereft of the fear of God, and that their feelings were given expression on some occasion or the other. On the contrary, the religious people of today are devoid of all such fear for the Lord. Their prayers fail to soften their hearts, and their recital of the name of God does not move them. Their faith does not generate any such sense of accountability in them as would make them feel that they were standing before God, conscious of His presence. Because their words are empty their prayers do not lead them to the discovery of God.

The following verse of the Quran applies to the people of today "Yet after that your hearts became as hard as rock or even harder, for from some rocks rivers take their course: some break asunder and water gushes from them; and other tumble down through fear of God. God is not unaware of what you do.

(The Quran 2:74)

23 December 1985

Returning good for evil

'Ubadah Ibn Samit said that the Prophet offered to tell his companions something which would raise them in God's sight. When they asked him to do so, he said: "Be forbearing with those who behave foolishly with you; forgive those who oppress you; give to those who deprive you and consolidate ties with those who sever their relations with you."

24 December 1985

Removing the Scales from one's Eyes

Abu Masood was one of the helpers of the Prophet. One day he became annoyed with his slave, and began beating him with a stick. Just at that moment the Prophet passed by. "Abu Masood he said, you should know that God has more power over you than that you have over this slave." On hearing the Prophet's words, the stick immediately fell from Abu Masood's hand. Furthermore, he granted the slave his freedom.

Initially, Abu Masood had thought of the matter as one between two human beings. He was master, and the other man a slave. He appeared himself to be on a higher plane than his slave. But on being jolted by what the Prophet said, the scales fell from his eyes and he related the entire matter to God. He saw that both he and the slave were equal in God's sight: neither of them had any superiority over the other; both of them were God's helpless servants. That was why the stick fell from his hand: he was in no position to beat his slave.

Were people to look at their situation in relation to God, the haves would see that they themselves were as destitute as the have-nots. When a person rises to a high position in society, he looks down on those beneath him. But were he to look at matters in relation to God instead of in relation to other people, his estimation of himself would be drastically depreciated: he would willingly share the lowly position he accords to others. For one person to speak contemptuously to another means that he considers the other person inferior to himself. Were he to look at himself in relation to God, his words would dry up; he would see that he himself was as powerless as the other before the Lord on high.

People should realize that when they are dealing with another person they are not just dealing with a human being like themselves. They are dealing with God, for eventually every matter will be referred to Him. Were they to look at matters this way, they would have no ground for pride, jealousy, love of power and injustice. The "stick with which they have been threatening and oppressing others would then fall from their hands, just as it fell from the hand of Abu Masood.